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A GLANCE

AT

PREVENTIVE MEDICINE IN 1769 AND IN 1874.

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AT a recent Meeting of the Dublin Obstetrical Society, DR. C. F. MOORE read the following paper:—

IN attempting “A Glance at Preventive Medicine in 1769 and in 1874,” unforeseen difficulties have arisen. Permit me, therefore, Mr. President and Gentlemen, to ask your indulgence for its many shortcomings.

I will here, by way of preface, dwell for a moment upon the existing state of society and science at or about the first period to be considered.

Commenting upon the times preceding the former date, the author of *A New History of England*^a wrote in 1766 as follows:—

“The powers of the human mind were freely and fully exercised in this period. Considerable progress was made in mathematics and astronomy by divers individuals—among whom we number Newton, Halley, Wallis, Barrow, Flamstead, Hudson, Sanderson, Bradley, Mac-laurin, Smith, and the two Simsons.

“Natural philosophy became a general study, and the new doctrine of electricity grew into fashion. Different methods were discovered for rendering sea-water potable and sweet, and divers useful hints were communicated to the publick by the learned Doctor Stephen Hale, who directed all his researches and experiments to the benefit of society. The study of alchemy no longer prevailed; but the art of chemistry was perfectly understood, and assiduously applied to the purposes of sophistication.”^b

This is not the place to enter into any detail of the long array of celebrated writers that marked the decades embraced in the first period referred to by the historian Mortimer—suffice to say, those were the

^a *A New History of England, &c.* By Thomas Mortimer, Esq., &c. London, 1766. Vol. III., pp. 788–793, &c.

^b Meant, I presume, in a good sense, as mixing useful compounds.—(C. F. M.)

days of Wm. Congreve, Steele, Farquhar, Addison, Swift, Prior, Crowe, Dryden, Pope, Parnel, Garth, Guy, Young, Thomson, Jno. Locke, Berkley, and many others.

We have more in common with the fact that it was about that time “the physician’s library was enriched with many useful modern productions; with the works of the classical Freind, the elegant Mead, the accurate Huxham, and the philosophical Pringle. The art of midwifery was elucidated by science, reduced to fixed principles, and almost wholly consigned into the hands of men practitioners. The researches of anatomy were prosecuted to some curious discoveries by the ingenuity and dexterity of a Hunter and a Monro. The numerous hospitals in London (and Mr. Mortimer might have added those also of Dublin) contributed to the improvement of surgery, which was brought to perfection under the auspices of a Cheselden and a Sharpe.” .

Our own island was not behindhand in progress, for we find that the Royal Hospital had been some time built, and Steevens’, Mercer’s, St. Patrick’s, so well known as Swift’s; that for Incurables, then in Fleet-street; Dr. Moss’s in Great Britain-street; St. Nicholas’, Francis-street, the old Meath Hospital, the Hibernian Hospital in the Park, the Foundling Hospital and Workhouse, the House of Industry, the Blucoate Hospital, the Royal Dublin Society, the Royal Irish Academy, the Hibernian Marine Society, and other valued and useful institutions, were founded or in working.

Such evidence of care for the sick, for the land and sea services—such energy of character—such literary talent—aye, and such evidence of the power of satire, as was manifest in the works of Hogarth and others who plied pen and pencil, and showed, in other ways, their disapproval of what was wrong, or believed to be so—existed on every side a hundred years ago. Commerce, too, was thriving, as seen in the growth of the Honourable East India Company; enterprise existed with many, not always to repay its possessors, as proved by the South Sea Bubble.

All this time the people of the British Isles maintained, with more or less success and renown, war with many powerful enemies. Solid evidence of successes remains in many of our colonial possessions, and of our reverses, no doubt sent for the best purposes, in the great Republic across the Atlantic.

That science, which is the more immediate object of this notice, might to a great extent be said to have taken a definite form at this period.

It was then that inoculation with the small-pox virus was introduced into these islands, institutions for the aid of soldiers' and sailors' children, for female outcasts, and soon after for venereal eases, were also established.

Wars by land and sea, as well as the enterprise of Captain Cook and other discoverers, led to much knowledge in practical hygiene about the time referred to. It was by these men that scurvy—that scourge of fleets and armies—was first shown to be avoidable.

During the last century many works were published on hygiene at home and abroad; some referred to the injurious effects of ladies' stays; some advocated sobriety, believing, doubtless, with the poet Denham that—

“Mirth makes them not mad,
Nor sobriety sad.”

Invocations to health were published in prose and in verse. The mother, the nurse, the child, were counselled to follow in the footsteps of the goddess, Hygeia.

In 1714 John Bellew wrote “An Essay towards the Improvement of Physic, by which the lives of many thousands may be saved yearly.”

Sir John Floyer wrote in 1725 upon the “Galenic Art of Preserving Old Men’s Health.”

Some years earlier an author, John Polus Leeaan, wrote—“Advice to the Gentlemen in the Army in Portugal and Spain.” This was published in London while the British army was engaged in Spain.

In 1722 Dr. John Quincy published the fourth edition of his “Compleat English Dispensatory,” to which he added “An Account of the Common Adulterations, both of *Simples* and *Compounds*, with some Marks to detect them by.”

Dr. Monro, M.D., in 1764, published “An Account of the Diseases of the British Army in Germany, with an Essay on the Means of Preserving the Health of Soldiers.”

The names of John Fothergill, Jno. Armstrong, M. A. Clarke, W. Smith, Hugh Smith, W. Rowley, with very many others at home and abroad, occur about the same time as writers on the subject of hygiene.

W. Rowley wrote, in 1776, on “Medical Advice for the Army and Navy in the American Expedition;” and in the same year Sir John Pringle published his “Discourse on Improvements for Preserving the Health of Mariners.”

Sir John took counsel with Captain Cook, as seen by the Captain's letter^a to the baronet when the latter was President of the Royal Society (dated, 5th March, 1776).

It is now several years since the Regius Professor of Physic (Dublin University) drew the attention of my fellow-students and myself at the Meath Hospital, to the great value of Captain Cook's precepts for the preservation of health, as seen by his writings and the effects upon the crews under his command.

During three years and eighteen days but one man of the crew of Captain Cook's ship, the "Resolution," died of illness, nor was that at all attributed to scurvy.

The Merchant Shipping Act of 1867 is, so to speak, by no means unmindful of the importance of the experience of the celebrated circumnavigator. It would be well if many of the provisions of the Act just referred to were made compulsory, instead of remaining, as at present, permissive. Most important and valuable enactments are now carried out in regard to the hulls, &c., of ships; what is now necessary to insure safety for property and life is to secure an efficient crew, for which at present the law only provides permissively, except in the matter of prevention of scurvy, which has worked^b so well already. Moreover, the coasting trade, employing fleets of vessels all round the coasts of the United Kingdom, is comparatively exempt from the operation of sanitary law and inspection, and consequently serves but too constantly to convey infectious disease wherever prevalent from port to port. Of this fact the records of every epidemic afford corroboration.

The great necessity existing at the present time for extension of preventive medicine to all classes of merchant seamen is seen by the circumstances represented a short time since by the Social Science Association to the Board of Trade. It was there shown that some 3,000 deaths, partly by disease, and partly by causes (neither sickness nor shipwreck), occur annually in the service.

Medical registration^c for the one, and legal inquiry for the other, is now called for, and it is to be hoped that success may attend the effort; for it is unnecessary to say how needful, not only in the cause of

^a *Philosophical Transactions*, 1776. Vol. LXVI., p. 402.

^b Scurvy has been lessened 80 per cent. by the working of the Act of 1867.

^c Registration of death, adopted some 18 years since in the Royal Navy, has been followed by an enormous reduction of mortality. See *Lancet*, May 2, 1874.

humanity and legitimate trade such steps are, but also to secure that national independence and safety which so largely, in our case, hangs on our maritime power.

We must not ignore the operation and influence of trade upon the home labour market in respect of the shipping enterprise of the United Kingdom, as well as in other directions.

It is not unlikely that, however it may operate injuriously, as it appears in respect of some points, it has, at the same time, operated beneficially. In opposing what might have otherwise become the domination of the labouring classes in the United Kingdom, events of the past few weeks show a tendency to equalization and to the correction of what a short time ago threatened to become a serious calamity.

It may be mentioned that, connected with this part of the subject, the same guarantees of successful vaccination required in the army and the navy should be legally obligatory on all young persons entering the merchant service. The great success that providentially attended the indefatigable industry of the able medical officers of the ports of London and of Liverpool, in so often securing the prompt isolation and treatment of cholera and small-pox last year, will surely prove an incentive to our Irish authorities to continue the measures adopted last year, and to extend them where required.

Early in the last century accounts of the small-pox inoculation, as practiced in the East, reached England. The Chinese, indeed, claim to have practiced "sowing" the disease, as they termed it, for centuries, by the *pleasant* expedient of putting some of the crusts into the nostrils, as mentioned by Sir Thomas Watson^a. According to the same eminent authority, Dr. Timoni, Dr. Woodward, Mr. Kennedy, M. Pylarini, anticipated Lady Mary Wortley Montague by short periods in the publication in Britain of the process as then practised in Turkey.

I will not detain my indulgent hearers by any long quotation from her great grandson's (Lord Wharncliffe) publication of her letters, but will merely preface her own words, as quoted by Sir Thomas Watson on the matter, by saying that she represents the plague and the inoculated small-pox, then existing in Turkey, as being of a very mild form; indeed, her account would rather lead the reader now-a-days to think that she herself possessed uncommon courage, great strength of mind, and a determination to make the best of everything, especially in her letters to those at home.

^a Watson on the Principles and Practice of Physic. 3rd ed. Vol. II., p. 787.

Under date 1st April, 1718, at Adrianople, Lady Mary Wortley Montague observes:—"The small-pox, so fatal and so general amongst us, is here entirely harmless by the invention of *engrafting*, which is the term they give it. Every year thousands undergo the operation, and the French ambassador says, pleasantly, that they take the small-pox here by way of diversion, as they take the waters in other countries. There is no example of any one who has died in it, and you may believe I am well satisfied of the safety of this experiment, since I intend to try it on my dear little son." Her daughter was the first person in England inoculated with the small-pox.

Several years before inoculation became established in England, Baron Dimsdale, the brothers Sutton, and others, claimed great success and almost perfect safety from the operation.

I have been favoured, by Arthur Haffield, Esq., of this city, with the inspection of a deed of "agreement between Robert Houlton, Master of Arts, late of Knight's Bridge, county Middlesex, but now of Waterford; Samuel Sparrow, late of the Strand, London, but now of Dublin, surgeon; and Charles Blake, late of Bath, but now of Cavan, surgeon, of the one part; and Charles Meares, of Gt. Ship-street, Dublin, gentleman, on the other part, as follows (to wit)," &c., &c. The articles go on to say that these gentlemen, having been "empowered, and duly authorized by the Sutton Family, in Great Britain, to use and practice the art and mystery of inoculation for the small-pox, commonly called the Suttonian method, in the Kingdom of Ireland, with powers to appoint other persons to use and practice the said art in Ireland, and other powers as mentioned and contained in certain deeds and articles duly executed to them by Messrs. Sutton," &c., and to appoint Mr. Meares as their "true and lawfull attorney, receiver, and general agent" in Ireland. By an inscription on the back, the document appears to have been signed by Mr. Houlton and Mr. Meares in presence of two witnesses, but only Mr. Meares' signature remains upon it, as a portion of the parchment is apparently cut away. Mr. Meares was to receive, and account for, all "ballances" to the other three persons named above, and to keep in safe custody all medicines or ingredients, nor to allow any to "make any essay, or philosophical or chymical experiment" with the same, except the three gentlemen above mentioned.

Excepting the law of patents, which is, like all human devices, imperfect, we have nothing at the present day like the joint-stock company.

described in the deed under consideration, trading, as it did, upon the human live stock of the Green Isle. I have not been able to learn anything about the proceedings of the company, but now mention it in the hope that some of my hearers may be able to give some information upon this part of the matter.

For the sake of the inoculated it is to be hoped the Suttonian method was not like that practised in Turkey, as described by Lady Mary Wortley Montague in the following words:—

“There is a set of old women who make it their business to perform the operation every autumn, in the month of September, when the great heat is abated. People send to one another to know if any of their family has a mind to have the small-pox; they make parties for the purpose, and when they are met (commonly fifteen or sixteen together), the old woman comes with a nutshellfull of the matter, of the best sort of small-pox, and asks what vein you please to have opened. She immediately rips open that you offer to her with a large needle (which gives you no more pain than a common scratch), and puts into the vein as much matter as can lie upon the head of her needle, and after that binds up the little wound with a hollow bit of shell, and in this manner opens four or five veins,” &c. “The children or young patients play together all the rest of the day, and are in perfect health to the eighth. Then the fever begins to seize them, and they keep their beds two days, very seldom three. They have rarely above twenty or thirty in their faces, which never mark, and in ten days time they are as well as before their illness. Where they are wounded, there remain running sores during the distemper, which I don’t doubt is a great relief to it. Every year thousands undergo the operation,” &c.

It is quite unnecessary to say a word in condemnation of this wholesale scattering of the germs of the most loathsome disorder,* as it has so often been called, to which the human race is subject; or to observe how serious are the objections that modern medicine would raise against the engrafting of so virulent a poison by its insertion into the very veins.

* A strange difference exists at present in the vaccination laws of Ireland and those of Great Britain. Here the age at which vaccination is required to have been performed is six months, but in England three months. During the late epidemic of small-pox many infants died of that disease, under six months of age, unvaccinated, and became, as I have elsewhere pointed out, centres of contagion. The pay of the vaccinator here is far less than in England. Such a state of things calls for assimilation with the English law.

We should be thankful that even the improved Suttonian method is now forbidden by stern enactments.

In Ireland an effort is being made by many to carry out sanitary improvements socially, and through the medium of legislative enactments; and it is to be hoped that the latter may be accomplished ere another dread lesson be taught us of our deficiencies, which latter are so patent to all who take the trouble to inquire and learn our great backwardness in these respects.

Although we have not Arab dhows reeking with that most fearful poison, the emanations from ill-treated and often starving human beings who are literally rammed into one mass of seething suffering and disease in a space—as I am told by an eye-witness—worse often than the black-hole of Calcutta, yet we have human beings crowded into small tenements befouled and poisoned with the effluvia of ages.

We need the enforcement of the law, that houses should be habitable, that the contagion of successive generations of fever stricken people should be destroyed with the defiled heaps of rubbish, called houses, that so abound in many of the older parts of our city.

We need protection against the results of ignorance and of habits of want of cleanliness, so common amongst the poor denizens of our courts and lanes. Such people should be taught the consequences of using the same vessels for the removal of everything offensive from their dwellings and for the bringing in of water from the fountains.

Those medical men who are, with the clergy, too often the sole visitors of the poor, can tell the suffering and sickness, and degradation of mind and body, so common among the people of the city alleys and back streets.

It is not to be wondered at that so many are victims of “drink” when the authorities allow such wretched lodgings, and so many cellars and other vile holes, called rooms, to remain. To-day I visited a poor girl in fever, in the Coombe. I inquired the cause of an offensive odour in the house. It proceeded, according to my informant, from a vegetable store under the room where lay the sick girl; indeed, when vegetables get bad, as my guide said, they are most dangerous. Some of the worst cases of rapidly fatal malignant fever that I have seen have come from such places, and it is to me incomprehensible how some gentlemen of the first ability as physicians, at this moment, profess publicly their disbelief in the influence exerted by bad smells^a in the production of fevers.

^a See “Athenaeum,” June 6th, 1874.

I do not desire to sit in judgment upon any one, much less on those whose knowledge and experience are appreciated wherever science has penetrated ; but I regret that statements are made, such as these to which I have alluded, by those who probably have never, or not for years, visited the homes of the fever-stricken poor.

The ill effects of such statements is seen in the unbelief evinced by so many of the unprofessional public in sanitary science ; this remark often applies less to the more intelligent of the working classes than to those a little higher up in the social scale.

The old story of the immunity from cholera of men and women employed in the north-east of England in gathering shell-fish on the shore, near the cholera-stricken ports, and of nightmen from fever, forms a strong argument for those who speak of harmlessness of filth. Superior physique, and the beneficial influence of the comparatively diluted emanations encountered by such persons, protect them ; but even these do not always escape. Witness the instantly fatal effect, every now and then, recorded of poisoning by sewer-gases,^a and the frequent attacks of a more insidious nature, from which even royalty itself has not been free.

What is it that aids unbelief in such causation of disease ? Too often other contributory influences to which the whole agency is ascribed. Three days since I saw a poor girl—for such, indeed, she was—suffering from all the serious train of symptoms so common in cases of over-nursing ; nor was I much surprised when she told me she had been for the last fourteen months, and still was, nursing her twin offspring. This poor girl presented incipient symptoms of fever. Another poor woman^b now has dry gangrene of the right thumb and index finger, as the sequelæ of deeply maculated typhus. She had furious delirium during the acute febrile stage. This sufferer had nursed one child for several months, and probably would have escaped without loss of health had she not lived in an unhealthy locality. In such cases the illness is too often put down to the fault of the nursing only.

The history of the fever-stricken houses, so familiar to the Dublin City District Medical Officers and to the working Committee of the Sanitary Association, is sufficient to convince the most sceptical.

Year after year wretched tenements in such houses contribute their quota of fever cases to the Dublin Hospitals, whilst they act as centres of contagion to the community, and give a bad name to the whole city.

^a See fatal cases in Liverpool, recorded in the journals two or three years since.

^b This poor woman died 13th June, 1874.

Here, as I have before done elsewhere, I would draw the attention of the profession to the frequency of cardiac pain in cases of over-nursing and of blood-poisoning, arising, as it seems to me, from one and the same cause, viz.:—the imperfect manner in which vitiated or impoverished blood (controvertible terms, as I think) discharges its duty in sustaining life (nourishing the heart itself, as it may be).

This same day I saw two children (the eldest a girl about nine years) thickly out in measles. She was suffering such agonizing pain of the heart that it rendered her almost insensible. Her condition was but a step removed from starvation; filth and misery characterized her dwelling—a wretched attic with coved ceiling—the heat of the burning June sun rendering the air of the over-crowded room almost unendurable, albeit the small window and the door were both open.

But I would weary your patience to record the experience of a single day in the life of a Dublin City District Medical Officer. I would add that city authorities should not permit decomposing filth to accumulate in our streets and lanes, and be blown by every blast of wind down our throats.

The Public Health Bill for Ireland contains much that is useful and workable. It has been so well discussed elsewhere that it seems unnecessary here to enter on its consideration. It is to be hoped, however, that certain defects in the English Bill will be avoided in that for Ireland, wherever they occur.

Nor should the miasmata of a thousand manure yards be allowed to befoul the air we breathe, and their offscour the sewers and water-courses and the river of our city.

The heavy mortality showing itself in forms varying with each change of season, proximity to small-pox,^a and the revival of cholera on the Continent, should make us ask ourselves—Are we as advanced as we should be in our means of defence against disease and demoralization? Are we, who have so many advantages over our predecessors of a century since, to wait with arms folded? Should we not rather prepare for the pestilence that walketh in darkness?

If we do so energetically we may rest assured of a brighter future for our land; and, while we should not lose sight of the usefulness of legal enactments for the promotion of hygiene, we must also remember that each person can influence his fellow, and that more will be achieved by kindness and instruction, as well as by example, than by coercive measures.

^a Small-pox is at present epidemic in some parts of England and Ireland.

